

ANOTHER CASE OF MGMT MISUNDERSTANDING? OR PRs' LACK OF CLOUT

Or practitioners not being persuasive -- or themselves not understanding? Consider the case: Virtually every study, every new mgmt book or hot corporate program finds internal com'n the key to change & growth in today's hypercompetitive climate. But ...

- Survey by MacDonald & Co. and The Cairns Group (pr 9/15) finds 54% of respondents reporting **resources** (budget, personnel) available for **communications to employees** have decreased in the past 5 yrs. 23% say they remain the same; only 23% report an increase.

We're supposed to be strategic leaders as our organizations transform themselves for the 21st century. Even with vastly greater efficiency we need either people or budgets to really focus on employee & managerial communication & relationship building.

CASE: HOW VOLVO, A NICHE MARKETER, FOCUSES TO COMPETE

Known around the world, 70th anniversary this year, 6 strong business sectors, ardent following in each -- yet the Sweden-based company is a shadow of a GM or a Toyota. PR is a major factor in success. Consider:

- **First move of new CEO** this month was to restructure top mgmt group to include the 2 senior pr jobs, com'ns and gov't relations & pa.
- **Mission statement is clear as a bell** about what company will do, and won't do [editor's numbering]: "Volvo advocates value by providing (1) transportation related (2) products & services (3) with superior *quality, safety & environmental care* (4) to demanding customers (5) in selected segments." To attain point 1, several food, pharmaceutical & other businesses have been sold.
- Italicized words are Volvo's **3 core values**, its USP (unique selling proposition) for competing & establishing a specific reputation. PR staff as well as all employees know what to emphasize to customers.

To establish participative style, new boss set up "CEO on line," e-mail direct to him. He told global pr conference he was "surprised, indeed astonished" at the number of responses -- tho he noticed they were mainly from computer & IS folks used to this medium. His Freudian slip response: "I would like to hear more from normal people...."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. PRSA '97 top award winners: Ed Block (retired sr vp of pr, adv'g & employee info, AT&T) receives Gold Anvil; Maria Russell (prof, chair of Syracuse U pr dep't) named Outstanding Educator; Stanton Hudson, Jr (Hudson & Assocs, & ass't prof & dir, grad prgm in org'l com'ns & devel,

Canisius College) receives Paul M. Lund Public Service Award.

RETIREES. Gaylin Morgan (founder -- 21 yrs ago -- & pres, Morgan & Myers, Jefferson, Wis). Gary Myers becomes firm's new pres & ceo.

RESEARCH SHOWS HOW TO BE EFFECTIVE IN PR's TRAINING ROLE

Research shows "people forget very quickly -- 40% in 30 minutes. They remember only 10% after a week. Lots of training money is wasted because people don't change their behaviors after workshops & seminars," says Jack Pyle of Face-to-Face Matters, whose continuous learning concept is based on what is known about learning & memory. (See also pr 9/1.) Pyle's approach to training:

1. **Limit training sessions** to 2-3 hours so people can get back to work.
2. **Teach only one basic skill or technique** to make it easy to remember & use. Don't teach new subjects until the current one is mastered.
3. **Have people create behavioral goals** to actually use the new skill at work. These "homework" assignments encourage its use.
4. **Schedule a 2-hour dialogue session about 2 weeks later** for them to talk about what happened when they used the new skill at work. This discussion of what works & what doesn't leads to additional insights about actual use of the new skill. Retrain if discussion shows the need.
5. **Continue training & dialogue sessions monthly** until the new skill is learned & used daily. Don't move on to teach another skill until behavior changes demonstrate people know how to use the first one.

(More from Pyle at 1800 N. Meridian, Mason, MI 48854; 517/655-4097; pylejack@pilot.msu.edu)

SLANG: AN IMPORTANT LANGUAGE FOR PRACTITIONERS TO MASTER

Slang is informal, usually a synonym for an existing, standard word. It has rhetorical effect, carries a sense of novelty, the undignified, & an irreverence that standard language just doesn't have, explains Jesse Sheidlower, project editor of the just released *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, Vol. II: H-O*.

Vol. I (A-G) was published in '94 (pr 8/29/94). Entire 3 volume tome is slated for completion in the year 2000. History of each word is traced with dated citations given. Some insights about slang from Sheidlower:

- Example: *Marijuana cigarette*, apart from being long & unwieldy, is an establishment term. *Joint* -- or *reefer*, *doobie*, *jay*, *blunt* or *spliff* -- not only sound punchy, but also express an anti-establishment attitude that is slang's purpose for existing.



- **Slang is created by an array of sources** -- crime, violence, gambling, the military, alcohol, drug use, etc. Mostly these are male dominated sources. But, as these areas become more open to women, it's likely that women will be as responsible for creating slang as men. Another reason for male dominance of slang: the attitudes of slang, including braggadocio, flippancy, cynicism & hyperbole, are not ones that normally hold much appeal for women. But this is changing. Studies show women are using much more slang than they have in the past.
- **Slang pervades American English** & is as much a part of communication as dialectal or Standard English. While a lot of lesser-regarded societal elements -- drug users, criminals, gamblers -- do use slang, so do pilots, surgeons & professors.
- **Slang is not jargon** -- the language of a particular social or professional group. Nor is it dialect, which is a regional variety of speech. Nor are words such as *rap*, *disco*, *heavy metal*, or *grunge*, because those are descriptive terms that cannot be said with any other word.
- **It is slang's unmistakable rhetorical force** that separates it from other levels of discourse. S.I. Hayakawa called slang "the poetry of everyday life." Some examples -- which sound more alive?

Slang	Standard English
kettle of fish	awkward or complicated state of affairs
Joe Schmo	a nobody
jillion	an indeterminate, extremely large number
jazzed	excited, enthusiastic
idiot box	tv set
ink slinger	a writer
heebie-jeebies	a feeling of anxiety or apprehension

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CASE STUDY: CD-ROM BECOMING POWERFUL REPLACEMENT FOR PRINT

Georgetown Prep has increased student admissions 25% by using interactive CD-ROMs to communicate with prospective students. School finds:

- CD-ROM & personalized letter answer info needs 95% of the time.
- Videos don't work as well, have been completely abandoned.
- Catalogs are used *only* if a parent specifically requests one.

BENEFITS OF USING CD-ROMs

- School's admissions yield rate -- percentage of prospective students who are offered places & then decide to come -- has risen from 69% last year to 85% this year. Officials attribute this to improved communication.
- Forecasted SAT scores of the students entering this fall (class of 2001) are higher, rising from 1200 to 1400.

- Applications were received 3 months early -- no longer procrastinating over what used to be a handwriting & paperwork ordeal.
- All this with no increase in the school's recruitment budget, explains Michael Horsey, dir of admissions.

RESEARCH INFORMS DECISIONS REVEALS BENEFITS

Horsey had 5 yrs of surveys behind him to aid in decisionmaking:

- Students -- not parents -- make 90% of the decisions on the school they are going to attend. Parents set up the parameters but students decide. Therefore, the CD-ROM is directed at students.
- The number one reason students select Georgetown Prep is they feel comfortable with the kids who are there. With the CD-ROM, prospective students can more closely identify with & get a feel for their peers.
- Students say they would spend less than 1 hr reading a brochure & would watch a video only once.
- But, they report spending more than 12 hrs -- some more than 24 -- on the CD-ROM.
- They are showing the CD-ROM to their friends, "substantially increasing our recruiting base beyond our expectations."
- Students say CD-ROM is more personalized, communicates a more accurate "feel" of the school than a brochure or video. It includes animation, digital photography, illustrations, music, student & faculty interviews -- unscripted -- plus campus & classroom sounds including a pep rally. "You get the feeling of actually talking to the person. It's a different feeling, an honest feeling," said one 8th grade boy.

STRATEGY BEHIND EFFECTIVE CD-ROM CREATION

- CD-ROM developer, Temel Inc (Boonton, NJ), was adamant that students be allowed to discover information by themselves. Kids' thinking is not linear. Instead they randomly bounce from one subject to another. "As students click on an athlete's uniform, a boy's tie or a girl's picture, they don't know what they're going to find. They like that sense of discovery. They also like being in control of the information & showing their parents the campus & school on the CD."
- "Students can click onto their interests in varying degrees of depth, obtaining only the information they want. I don't think you can do that with any other medium. A survey of the incoming class finds the number 2 reason they applied to Georgetown Prep, after the campus visit, was the CD-ROM. It's more important than what their parents or friends tell them," notes Horsey. (More from him at 301/214-1215)

Georgetown Prep's CD-ROM experience "is further evidence of how adolescent boys & girls are leading us as they click their way interactively into the next generation of communications."